Unit .31

Easter

From Despair to Joy

Scripture

John 20:11-18

11 But Mary stood outside the tomb, crying. As she
was crying, she stooped to look into the tomb. **12** She
saw two angels in white sitting where Jesus's body had
been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.
13 They said to her, "Woman, why are you crying?"
"Because they've taken away my Lord," she told them,
"and I don't know where they've put him." **14** Having
said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing
there, but she did not know it was Jesus. **15** "Woman,"
Jesus said to her, "why are you crying? Who is it that
you're seeking?" Supposing he was the gardener, she
replied, "Sir, if you've carried him away, tell me where
you've put him, and I will take him away." **16** Jesus
said to her, "Mary." Turning around, she said to him
in Aramaic, *"Rabboni!"*—which means "Teacher."
17 "Don't cling to me," Jesus told her, "since I have
not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers
and tell them that I am ascending to my Father and
your Father, to my God and your God." **18** Mary
Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I
have seen the Lord!" And she told them what he had
said to her.

Intro Options

Main Point:
Jesus' resurrection turns our sorrow into joy.

Option 1

In your large group, brainstorm three lists with your students. You can have them call out suggestions while you or other students write on the board, or you can block off three sections of the board and let students write their suggestions in each section. The three lists should be:

Something a little special you can be part of

Something pretty special you can be part of

Something incredibly special you can be part of

For example, it might be a little special to be part of an internet fan club; it would be pretty special to be part of a magnet or charter school; it would be incredibly special to be part of a professional -famous band.

ask students to get into pairs or trios. Each group should pick one or two items from any list(s) and share with each other how it would affect their lives to be part of whatever item they chose. Then, in the large group, ask some students to share how being part of that item would affect their lives. Generally speaking, are people more affected by being part of something a little special or more special? How does the specialness of something we are part of affect the significance of our lives?

We are celebrating Easter. The resurrection of Jesus makes us part of the most special thing in the universe: His church. We'll see today how His resurrection affects every part of our lives for good.

Your students may make skits in small groups, or they could create drawings if they want to work alone. Either way, they are to try to decide what "The Despair Killer" would be. Despair is a strong, tragic emotion; what could possibly break it? They might choose joy, or purpose, or relationships, or hope. Whatever they choose, they should show that emotion or thing at work in a skit or in a drawing. Once they prepared their drawings and skits, let them share their answers and their skits/drawings. As a group, discuss what they came up with: were any answers particularly insightful? Did you see any common themes? Can they, as a class, come to a consensus for the great despair-killer?

In today's session, we'll see the time of greatest despair: when Jesus, the Messiah, lay dead in the tomb. We'll also see that despair die by the greatest despair-killer: the risen Jesus, who defeats death and gives us mission and purpose.

TEACHING PLAN

Read John 20:11-13.

Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early Sunday morning, grieving the loss of her Lord. So many hopes and expectations came crashing down in just one weekend, and as she approached to the tomb to honor Jesus, she is faced with an unexpected scene. Not only have they crucified the One she hoped in, but they took His body away, too (John 20:13). Mary had yet to realize that Jesus had risen, though Scripture foretold this and Jesus Himself predicted it throughout His ministry (see Matt. 12:40; 16:21; 17:9; 20:17-19; John 2:19).

- **Have you ever lost something or someone that you loved?**

In a fallen world, life is full of loss and sorrow. Death is the final enemy to be defeated (1 Cor. 15:26). At moments like these, faith can be difficult. The doubts and questions and pains are real. We wrestle with difficult questions and struggle to make sense of life in a broken world. There's nothing ungodly or unspiritual about grieving, but Mary's grief is, to some degree, incompatible with the truth because she thinks Jesus' body has been stolen or removed.

What Mary had yet to realize was that with Jesus, death is never the final outcome. Sometimes in our grief, we can miss what God is doing. We can become so discouraged by our pain that we forget God's promise. We, so easily, lose sight of the eternal picture.

- **When facing heartache and grief, what are some ways that we can stay anchored in the truth?**

A few things can anchor us in reality when we grieve. We need to grieve in community. Fortunately, Mary had the angels there to redirect her to the truth of the resurrection. Too often, we pull back and isolate ourselves in our sorrows and hard times. We also need to remember what God has already promised and revealed. Jesus had already foretold His resurrection, but Mary wasn't calling that to mind in her moment of despair. In the moments of deepest sorrow in our lives, we must remember what God has spoken and promised.

Read John 20:14-16.

- **Have you ever misidentified someone? If so, share.**

I can think of a handful of occasions where I thought that I saw someone I knew, approached them, and called them by name, only to realize it was a different person. At our Wednesday night student service, I saw a guy walk up behind someone he thought he knew and give him a big bear hug, only to quickly realize it was someone else. Talk about embarrassing! This is a funny comparison, but it is important that we recognize Jesus in our lives.

Jesus said Mary's name. That's what it took to open her eyes to Jesus' identity and produce the joy that only He can give. In our sorrow, Jesus invites us to come to Him, "all of you who are weary and burdened" (Matt. 11:28). He has promised, "a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench" (Matt. 12:20). We can cast our cares upon Him because He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:17).

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus' resurrection turns our sorrow into joy.

John 20

20:11-13. Many of the greatest believers who have come before us struggled with the pain and brokenness of the world. Joseph, Job, Stephen, Paul, and many others, suffered, lost loved ones, and faced sickness and death. Many of their lives ended in perplexing and tragic ways. And they all (even Jesus!) grieved. Job was unable to be comforted at all for a week (Job 2:13). Paul wrote as much about eternal life as anyone, and yet when his friend was near death, he said in Philippians 2:27 that if he had died, Paul would have had sorrow upon sorrow. Sorrow is real. The death of those we love is among the greatest pains. There's nothing ungodly or unspiritual about grieving. Even though we know the final outcome, we still grieve (1 Thess. 4:13).

"Job never saw why he suffered, but he saw God, and that was enough." [1]

20:14-16. In order to raise Mary's countenance and bring forth resurrection faith in her, Mary had to hear Him say her name. No, it wasn't the gardener, as she first supposed, but it was the second and last Adam, the one who came to undo the thorns and thistles that the first Adam left us with.[2]

"At this point, Jesus revealed himself to Mary by tenderly calling her name. Amazed and delighted, she cried out, 'Rabboni,' meaning 'my teacher' (20:16). Jesus had been called 'Rabbi' (Teacher) by his disciple and others (1:38,49; 3:2), but Mary's cry indicated the personal nature of her relationship to her Lord. She stands for all the sheep who hear and respond to the voice of the good shepherd, who 'call his own sheep by name' (10:3-4)."[3]

In a sermon from 1878, J.C. Ryle said, "The world is full of sorrow because it is full of sin. It is a dark place. It is a lonely place. It is a disappointing place. The brightest sunbeam in it is a friend. Friendship halves the troubles and doubles our joys." [4]

1. Tim Keller, Twitter post, April 5, 2014, 11 a.m., https://twitter.com/timkellernyc/status/452475905274040320
2. Scotty Smith, "John," in Gospel Transformation Bible: ESV (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).
3. Pratap C Gine and Jacob Cherian, "John," in South Asia Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary on the Whole Bible, ed. Brian Wintle (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2015).
4. J.C. Ryle, "THE BEST FRIEND!," The Best Friend, 1878, https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/best_friend.htm.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 40, DDG)

Christ's Exaltation

Whereas the death of Christ was the ultimate example of His humiliation, the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the first and glorious example of Christ's exaltation. Christ was exalted when God raised Him from the dead, and Christ was exalted when He ascended to the Father's right hand. He will be exalted by all creation when He returns. All of these aspects work together to magnify the glory and worth of Christ, resulting in the praise of the glory of His grace in rescuing sinners.

TEACHING PLAN

- **What are some ways you have recognized Jesus' presence and comfort in the painful moments of your life?**

In my own painful moments in life, I have experienced God's presence and comfort in two places—His Word and His people. God's Word is full of truth, hope, and promises that comfort our hearts in the hardest of times. God also uses His people as a source of His presence and comfort. The Holy Spirit dwells within the church, so as we bear each other's burdens and comfort one another, we experience God's presence and comfort.

Read John 20:17-18.

It's one thing to see an empty tomb; it's another to see a risen Lord. Like Mary exemplifies here, recognizing the risen Jesus should lead to being on mission for the risen Jesus.

When Mary's sorrow turned to joy, Jesus wanted her to share that joy with others. God wants to do more than just comfort us; He wants to use us as vessels for His comfort.

Second Corinthians 1:4-5 teaches us this very thing. It says God "comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort overflows."

- **How has God used others to comfort you? How can God use you to comfort others?**

In verse 18, Mary goes to report that she has "seen the Lord!" Can you hear the joy in her voice? Encountering the resurrected Jesus makes all the difference in this world of pain and brokenness. It reminds us that this is not the end and that death and sorrow will not have the final word. Gavin Ortlund tweeted, "Easter is the end of history reinserted back into the middle of history. So when we see the risen Jesus, we know what is to come."[5]

- **When we are hurting, what are some unhealthy ways we seek comfort or try to numb our pain?**

Tragically, when we are hurting, we often run to destructive habits for comfort and joy. It may be an eating disorder, cutting, drugs, pornography, the mindless absorption of TV or social media, etc. We don't want to feel the pain, so we try to numb it with things that relieve or distract it in the short term, but compound it in the long run. It is critical that we turn from those "broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13).

We need to turn to God, who is the "fountain of living waters" (Jer. 2:13). Like the woman at the well in John 4, we fill ourselves with relationships and everything but Jesus, yet we are still thirsty. As Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again" (John 4:13). Jesus invites all who thirst to come to Him and drink and be filled (John 7:37).

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus' resurrection turns our sorrow into joy.

John 20

20:17-18. "When Jesus said to Mary, 'Don't cling to Me' (v. 17), He was not concerned about being touched since He asked Thomas to touch Him (v. 27). Rather, He wanted Mary to realize that He was there only temporarily. His return to the Father was imminent." [6]

"John 20:17 is...the insistence that the resurrection is so tied to the ascension, to Jesus' return to his Father, that if Mary can accept the one, she must be prepared to accept the implications of the other." [7]

"Not only have they turned away from the fountain of life and joy, but the cisterns they make can't hold that water anyway. They're broken. No fountain. No cistern. Therefore, no life, no lasting joy. They're going to die. The money cistern is broken. The sex cistern is broken. The family cistern is broken. The beauty and brawn cistern is broken. The success cistern is broken. The political cistern is broken. None of them can hold the water of life and lasting happiness. And the fountain that has been forsaken could fill them."[8]

Activity

As a large group, brainstorm some examples of situations in which people, both Christian or unbelievers, can experience despair. It could be the loss of a pet, the lack of friends, or even the hostility of a cruel government.

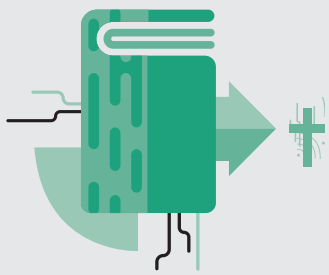
Break your students into small groups for skits (or individuals may draw comic strips). Mary's experience at the tomb in today's lesson gives us a model for how to face despair: to joyfully recognize the risen Lord in the midst of that despair and to grasp the mission He brings. Each group should choose an example of despair from the brainstorming session. They should create a skit or comic strip with three components: first, the situation causing despair; second, the breaking-in of the risen Lord Jesus into that situation; third, the hope and purpose His presence brings to that situation.

Share and debrief by exploring how Jesus' resurrection brings hope in all situations. How does the hope of the resurrected Jesus help Christians? Whom might we know or encounter in the next month who needs an "appearance" of the resurrected Jesus to bring Easter hope to their despair?

5. Gavin Ortlund, Twitter post, April 12, 2020, 3:43 p.m., https://twitter.com/gavinortlund/status/1249437942495371266
6. Tamra Hernandez, "John," in Study Bible for Women (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2014).
7. D.A. Carson, The Gospel According to John (The Pillar New Testament Commentary (PNTC)) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Reprint Edition, 1990).
8. John Piper, "The Ultimate Essence of Evil: The Majesty of God, the Triumph of Christ, and the Glory of Human Life," Desiring God, January 3, 2017, https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-ultimate-essence-of-evil.

(p. 42, DDG) Christ Connection

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not only the cornerstone of the gospel, but also the source of joy and hope for all believers. Because Jesus died to pay the penalty of sin and rose again, we have good news to share with others.



FROM DESPAIR TO JOY

John 20:11–18

FROM DESPAIR TO JOY

Jesus' resurrection turns our sorrow into joy.

JESUS CONNECTION

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not only the cornerstone of the gospel, but also the source of joy and hope for all believers. Because Jesus died to pay the penalty of sin and rose again, we have good news to share with others.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

JOY – Having a cheerful response, regardless of my circumstances.

HEAD

When Mary saw that Jesus' body was gone, what did she think happened?

How did Mary respond when she realized who Jesus was?

HEART

How can knowing that Jesus rose from the dead help us when we face hard situations?

Why does the power of Jesus' resurrection bring a joy that cannot be drowned when we suffer or struggle with anxiety, depression or anger?

HANDS

On hard days, it's easy to lose sight of what brings us joy. On a piece of paper (or card stock or construction paper) write out Psalm 16:11, "In your presence is abundant joy." Then, cut or print pictures of things that bring you joy and glue or tape them to your paper (or create an online collage if you have a device). Hang your collage where you can see it this week to remind you that God is the source of joy.